DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 301 790 CG 021 277

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TITLE Institutionalized and Non-Institutionalized Elderly Adults' Psychological Adjustment: An Ecological Study.
PUB DATE Apr 88
NOTE 10p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Eastern Psychological Association (59th, Buffalo, NY, April 21-24, 1988).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adjustment (to Environment); Adult Development; Comparative Analysis; Depression (Psychology); Emotional Adjustment; *Institutionalized Persons; *Life Satisfaction; Locus of Control; *Older Adults; Psychological Characteristics; Social Networks

ABSTRACT

Much evidence has indicated that personal networks with family, friends, and community members can enhance health and improve psychological adjustment. Personal networks provide elderly persons in particular with companionship, practical help, and useful advice. The ecological models proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1979) portrays the social networks of an individual as concentric circles which consist of a microsystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. This study examined the differences in the overall ecological environment of the elderly in institutions in comparison to the elderly community residents, and investigated the way in which the changes in the ecological systems influence the elderly's adaptability and adjustment. Institutionalized (N=23) and noninstitutionalized (N=18) older adults' life adjustment was explored using Brofenbrenner's ecological model of human development. Institutionalization alone was not found to be associated with depression, life satisfaction, or locus of control. However, the degree to which the micro, exo, and macro ecological systems were functional was found to be associated with the dependent variables. Particularly, the functioning of the exosystem was found to be associated with depression and life satisfaction, and was the most evident among the institutionalized elderly. (Author/NB)

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INSTITUTIONALIZED AND NON-INSTITUTIONALIZED ELDERLY ADULTS' PSYCHOLOGICAL ADJUSTMENT: AN ECOLOGICAL STUDY

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CG 021277

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Institutionalized and Noninstiitutionnalized Elderly Adults' Psychological Adjustment: An Ecological Study.

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Institutionalized and noninstitutionalized older adults' life adjustment was investigated using Brofenbrenner's ecological model of human development. Institutionalization alone was not found to be associated with depression, life satisfaction or locus of control. However, the degree to which the micro, exo and macro ecological systems were functional was found to be associated with the dependent variables. Particularly, the functioning of the exo system was found to be associated with depression and life satisfaction, and was the most evident among the institutionalized elderly. Results were discussed based on Brofenbrenner's model.

Institutionalized and Non-institutionalized Elderly Adults'

Psychological Adjustment: An Ecological Study

A substantial amount of evidence indicates that personal networks, close connections with family members, friends, and other members of the community, enhance health and improve psychological adjustment (Rosenberg, 1967). Personal networks provide individuals and elderly persons in particular with companionship, practical help, and useful advice. Moreover, the people who make up an individual's social network make it possible to communicate with, understand, and obtain benefits from unfamiliar individuals, large social institutions, and material resources.

The ecological models proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1979) portrays the social networks of an individual as concentric circles. According to this model, regardless of age, an individual does not interact directly with the world at large. Instead, he interprets experiences and solves problems through a microsystem, an intimate personal network of kin, friends, other caring persons, and familiar objects and places. The microsystem is in transaction with at least two other social circles, namely, the exosystem and macrosystem. The exosystem is the extension of the individual's microsystem toward a broader realm of social interaction. Through the microsystem, the individual can negotiate exchanges with the exosystem, which consists of relationships with peripheral members of the extended family, casual friends, and neighbors. Through a well functioning exosystem, the individual has access to the macrosystem. The macrosystem consists of large social institutions such as government bodies, religious organizations, the mass media and public service organizations.

As one gets older, he/she constantly adjusts and adapts to the changes in these systems. The dynamics of these ecological systems are assumed to remain intact throughout adult development. As Bronfenbrenner (1979) suggested,

normative developmental processes are endless and continuous, that occur through the changes within these systems.

Among the major non-normative developmental events that may occur to an older person is institutionalization. Although many diverse views regarding institutionalization have been proposed (e.g. Kasl), no study has yet systematically investigated the developmental impact of institutionalization (i.e. non-normative event) in regard to the overall developmental changes that it may bring about.

The main purpose of this study is to investigate the differences in the overall ecological environment of the elderly in institutions in comparison to the elderly community residents. Furthermore, this study intended to investigate the way in which the changes in the ecological systems influences the elderly's adaptability and adjustment. It was hypothesized that deficiencies and gaps in the ecological system are created by institutionalization which extends its effects into the broader social systems causing the overall support system to collapse. Collapses in these systems may result in changes in perceptions of overall life quality, attitude, mood, sense of control, and life satisfaction.

Method

Subjects

A total of 41 older individuals participated in this study. Twenty-three were institutionalized residents (mean age = 72, 18 females, 5 males) and 18 were community residents (mean age = 70, all females). The subjects in both groups were volunteer participants.

Materials

Based on the general definition of the ecological model of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), a total of sixty questions were written to assess the operation of the micro, exo and macrosystems. The questions

assessed the elderly's social involvement, existing and functional aspect of their immediate environment, sense of control over their life, perception of the community activities and knowledge and perception of broader social agencies.

As a reliability check on these questions independent judges were given the definitions of the three ecological systems. The judges sorted the questions into categories to reflect micro, exo, and macrosystems. Only those items that yielded an agreement rate of 75% or more were used in the study. This led us to an uneven number of questions concerning each system (micro, 13 items, exo, 10 items, and macro, 7 items).

The dependent measures of life satisfaction (Neugarten, Havighurst, & Tobin, 1961), locus of control (Rotter's, 1966) and depression (Zung, 1967), were selected because of their sensitivity and importance in adjustment processes in adulthood (Hann, 1977).

Results

In order to test hypotheses derived from Bronfenbrenner's (1979) model of development, group membership (institutionalized vs. noninstitutionalized) and scores on the Micro, Macro, and Exosystem varibles were regressed on psychological adjustment. Adjustment was assessed using three measures of life satisfaction (Satisfaction, 1, 2, and 3), Locus of Control Scale (higher scores indicated greater internality), and the Depression scale (higher scores indicated less depression). In addition, the degree to which institutionalized vs. noninstitutionalized subjects differed in their Micro, Macro, and Exosystem scores was tested.

The result of the multiple regression analyses using group membership (dummy coded so that noninstitutionalized subjects were the reference group) and Micro, Macro, and Exosystems scores as predictors of psychological adjustment are summarized in Table 2 (Table 1 contains zero-order correlations

among these variables and their means). Each of the models reported yielded significant R-squares; Fs (4,33) ranged from 4.68 (Satisfaction 3) to 9.11 (Locus of Control). As indicated in Table 2, Micro system variables were significant individual predictors of Satisfaction and Depression, Macrosystem variables were significant predictors of Locus of Control, and Exosystem variables were significant individual predictors of Satisfaction and Depression. In all cases, higher scores on Micro, Macro, and Exosystems variables were associated with greater psychological adjustment. Group membership was not a significant individual predictor in any of the models.

One-way ANOVAs were carried out on institutionalized vs. noninstitutionalized subjects' Micro, Macro, and Exosystem scores. There were no differences in their Micro scores, however, noninstitutionalized subjects generated higher scores on the Macro and Exosystems (M=13.88 and 24.59 respectively) than did institutionalized subjects (M=12.24 and 20.52 respectively), F(1,36)=35.75 and 24.79 for Macro and Exosystem respectively, p <.001 in both cases.

Discussion

The pattern of results in this study suggests that being institutionalized or not is not per-se the determining factor regarding the older adult's adjustment processes. It is their accessability and involvement with the ecological systems that will determine their overall adjustment. Although all three ecological systems have in one way or another contributed to the differences observed between institutionalized and non-institutionalized elderly, it is the access to a broader community life around the institutionalized elderly (exosystem) that is associated with overall satisfaction and degree of depression.

The closest network of kin and relatives (microsystem) may have remained relatively unchanged, or mostly attended to when institutionalization occurred.

Nonetheless, the sense of community involvement, social and political, and control over one's destiny may decline dramatically when the person is institutionalized. As indicated by our data, exosystem and microsystem scores were lower for the institutionalized elderly than that of non-institutionalized. Moreover, the degree to which one level of life satisfaction and emotional mood (depression) is determined by the aforementioned system.

An individual with a large social support network maintains a balanced relationship within his/her life that frequently leads to a sense of life satisfaction regardless of place of residency. Nonetheless, individuals that have been provided with a rich microsystem and a poorly functioning exosystem and/or macrosystem may experience adjustment difficulties. In conclusion, the greater amount of emphasis that is placed upon establishing the immediate network of support is not sufficient for the overall life satisfaction of the institutionalized elederly. Being part of a community, sharing life, and being involved seemes to be a better predictor of the overall life satisfaction and adjustment among the elderly institutionalized and noninstitutionalized.

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Table 1

Correlations of Predictor and Dependent Variables

	GP	MI	MA	EX	ST1	ST2	ST3	LOC	DEP	Means
Predictors										
Group (GP)		02	-63	-56	-47	-07	-36	-51	-17	0.55
Micro (MI)			01	-19	19	30	26	-06	48	299.45
Macro (MA)				40	40	38	35	59	10	12.97
Exo (EX)					56	07	45	52	23	22.34
Dependent Variables										
Satisfaction-1 (ST1)						29	57	32	59	18.32
Satisfaction-2 (ST2)							44	17	41	16.26
Satisfaction-3 (ST3)								51	61	12.47
Locus of Control (LOC)									28	13.68
Depression (DEP)										60.21

Note: Decimal points have been omitted for correlations. Group was dummy coded so that noninstitutionalized subjects were the reference group. Locus of Control and Depression were scored so that high scores indicated greater internality and less depression, respectively. Critical values of r for this table are 32 at $p < .05$ and 44 at $p < .01$.

Table 2

Summary of Multiple Regression Analyses

Dependent Variables/Predictors	Model R2	B	partial r
Satisfaction 1	0.44**		
Group		-1.02	-.10
Micro		.006	.35
Macro		.49	.13
Exo		.71	.48**
intercept	0.36**		
Satisfaction 3			
Group		- .38	-.04
Micro		.005	.36*
Macro		.32	.09
Exo		.49	.38
intercept		-4.03	
Locus of Control	0.52**		
Group		- .75	-.09
Micro		- .0005	-.04
Macro		1.34	.41**
Exo		.33	.31
intercept		-10.59	
Depression	0.42**		
Group		-2.77	-.13
Micro		.02	.56**
Macro		-.89	-.11
Exo		.98	.35*
intercept		45.10	

Note: Group was dummy coded so that noninstitutionalized subjects were the reference group. Locus of Control and Depression were scored so that high scores indicated greater internality and less depression, respectively.

*$p < .05$ **$p < .01$